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TO PENTECOST

ANDREW MURRAY



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BACK TO PENTECOST

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BACK TO PENTECOST

THE FULFILMENT OF
"THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER"

(Acts i. 4)

BY THE
REV. ANDREW MURRAY, D.D.

AUTHOR OF
"THE FULL BLESSING OF PENTECOST," ETC.

WITH AN APPRECIATION BY
MR ALBERT A. HEAD

A CHAIRMAN OF THE KESWICK CONVENTION FOR
THE DEEPENING OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

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APPRECIATION

Like many of the books written by Dr Andrew Murray, there runs through, from beginning to end, a scarlet thread of co-ordinating thought and practical principle which binds the sectional parts together, and so formulates a whole, that a vision, clearly defined, appears to the mind of the reader which influences and defines conception and furnishes a foundation upon which "God's building" of "the Temple of the Holy Ghost" may arise (1 Cor. iii. 9 and vi. 19). This thread, in the present volume, seems to embrace the facts and features of (1) The Holy Spirit in the believer for holiness; (2) The Holy Spirit through the believer for service.

As on Ascension Mount our Lord commanded His disciples to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with "power from

on High," so the two commands—"wait" and "receive"—constitute the avenues of blessing, the channels by which the fulfilment of promise becomes a present and continual possession and a never-failing experience.

In all these interweavings of desire, relationship, and purpose, Dr Murray gives prominent place to the important thread of prayer, and that prayer, not the individual service of intercession alone, but a continuation of effectual fervent prayer which proceeds from the united intercession of those combined forces which proceed from the Church of Christ "which is His Body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 23). If believers were only to recognise more fully the unity for which our Lord prayed in John xvii. 21—"That they all may be one. . . . That the world may believe," how greatly increased would be the linking in of the members of that Body of Christ to the service of intercession perpetually rendered by the Son and the

Holy Spirit (Romans viii. 26, 27, and 34), and thereby prove what a never-failing fulfilment there is in continuity of prayer —“praying always” and “in everything by prayer,” and the consequent abundant answer.

The object of this book is to awaken a desire for a revival of true religion which shall rouse the Church of Christ to take a place in the world which shall quicken professing Christians and enable them to comprehend that the Lord Jesus Christ has a claim upon them to witness to the Cross and to the salvation which He came to fulfil and which meets the need of mankind, and for lack of which millions are perishing to-day without hope and without God in the world. It is also the privilege of witnesses to claim and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit whereby they may be sanctified wholly, and, separated from the world, may become witnesses to the truth as it is in Jesus. “Ye shall be witnesses unto Me.” Further, there is the need for

the holy life—not the lukewarm formalism of to-day, but the daily witness to the experience “No longer I but Christ.”

The war and its horrors is daily trumpeting the need of the return of our blessed Lord to right what is wrong, to bring victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil.

In the pages of this book are heart-searching words, and the urgent entreaty of a brother beloved, ere he concluded a life-long witness to the truth, the which truth is nothing but the truth, and the fragrance of this prayer life pervades his soul-stirring entreaty that the people of God should be up and doing, their loins girded, their lamps burning, awaiting the return of their Lord.

Dr Murray's exhortation when leaving these shores in November 1895, after his memorable visits to the Assembly Hall, to Keswick, Scotland, and elsewhere, was focussed in the words of the Apostle Paul to the Church at Ephesus: “Praying

always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints”—especially emphasising the words “for all saints.” Surely the message of this volume will once more revive the sense of responsibility and privilege that, if judgment begin with the house of God, mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, should find the members of the Body of Christ in closer and closer bonds as the final days of this dispensation approach, and the return of our blessed Lord draws nigh.

The great lesson of the war is the wonderful manifestation of the patriotic spirit whereby all grades of society responded to the call of King and country to go to the battle, and to protect the right. Is there not in this ready consecration of all that the soldier possesses, a lesson for those whom the Master “calleth by name,” to present themselves to Him as the Great Captain of their salvation, now in these

last days, and when the call comes : “ Who will go for us ? ” that the ready answer from a loyal heart shall be : “ Here am I, Lord, send me.”

ALBERT A. HEAD

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IN THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST

A FOREWORD

IN studying the conditions of Pentecost the question naturally arises what there was in the disciples that made them fit to be the chosen recipients of the wonderful gift from heaven. It needs but little reflection, when once the question has been seriously put, to find the answer. The school through which our Lord had passed when "He, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself to God," and proved Himself worthy of receiving from the Father in glory the fulness of the Spirit to communicate to men, was the school through which they had passed too. To Him it meant that death to sin and the world was the one condition for His being made partaker of the glory of heaven and the

fulness of the Spirit to impart to His disciples on earth.

Christ had, though they knew it not, undertaken to fit them for the gift. When they forsook all and followed Him, when they accepted His teaching to hate and to lose their own life, to deny themselves and take up their cross, to follow Him even to the shame and utter darkness of Calvary, they were in reality being prepared to sacrifice the whole world and their own life, as the one thing that would prepare them for being filled with the Spirit of their crucified and glorified Lord.

When once we strive to take in the full meaning of this preparation, the entire emptying of self, and of everything that this world can offer, we begin to understand how it is that there is often much prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit without any apparent answer. It is because the Holy Spirit claims nothing less than an absolute

and entire surrender, for the life of heaven to take complete possession and exercise full mastery. Is it not because in the Church there is so much prevailing of the spirit of the world, with its lust of the flesh, and lust of the eyes and pride of life, that the Holy Spirit is so little known in His blessed presence and power ?

In a little book that has just been published, "WHEN GOD CAME," we have some account of three of the great Revivals that there have been in the Church, in which we have discovered to us to what an extent the enjoyment of whatever pleasure this world can give has to be completely sacrificed and put away, ere the presence and the power of God can be revealed in full measure.

The first revival alluded to was that in which Francis of Assisi was the leader. After struggling for two years in the dark, he cried in his heart : "Great

and glorious God, and Thou, Lord Jesus, I pray Thee, shed abroad Thy light in the darkness of my mind. Be found of me, Lord, so that in all things I may act only in accordance with Thy holy will." As he knelt in silence he heard the voice of Christ speaking to him.

At once he knew what was required of him—to give up everything and follow the Crucified. He resolved to sell all his remaining possessions and leave his home for good. He spent much time in quiet contemplation and in ministering to the lepers, until one day he heard the Gospel read : " Wherever ye go, preach, saying, The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils ; freely ye have received, freely give."

This was what he longed for. And his life proved most wonderfully how his surrender of all to Christ was owned and blessed of God. In the midst of a Church in which wealth and the world

with its sins held rule, God used Francis to help tens of thousands of hungry, seeking souls, to bring to them the knowledge of Christ as a personal Saviour, and the service of God as the one object of life.

The question arises : In how far this devotion of all his possessions, this sacrifice of everything that the world counts pleasure, was needed, to rouse men to an interest in heavenly things, and to give him that wonderful power of the Holy Spirit to carry the life and the love of Christ into the hearts of those who knew Him not ? It is only as we seek an answer to this question that we shall be able to find light in regard to that other question so important to all of us : What is it that hinders the power of the Spirit in the Church ? What is it that will fit us as clean vessels, wholly given to Christ, for the power of the Spirit to have free course through us, to bring light to the millions that are

waiting for some power to lift them out of darkness into the light and joy of God.

In the second sketch we have the story of the "Friends of God" in the fourteenth century, and specially of their influence on Tauler of Strasburg. When this great preacher was at the height of his popularity, one of the friends asked him to preach a sermon on the way to attain the highest spiritual life. When he had done this, speaking of self-surrender and renunciation as the only path to true inward holiness, the friend, after they had partaken together of the Holy Communion, told him that though his sermon contained much that was good, yet HE HIMSELF DID NOT LIVE ACCORDING TO IT. He trusted to his learning and the letter of Scripture, but as yet knew nothing of the power of the Holy Ghost. Tauler's answer was: "Dear Son, I would have thee to know that, old as I am, I have

never been spoken to in such fashion all my life."

The layman quietly persisted: "If you look into yourself you will, for one thing, find it out by the love of vanity and carnal ease, whereby your vessel is spoiled and made unclean. And so it comes to pass that your teaching is without savour and BRINGS NO GRACE. And whereas I further said that you were still in darkness, this is also true, and may be seen hereby that so FEW RECEIVE THE GRACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH YOUR TEACHING."

After further talk, and hearing the layman's experience, the preacher was convinced that he had indeed been living the life of a Pharisee before God, SPEAKING OF THINGS OF WHICH HE HAD NO EXPERIENCE, and binding upon others teachings of perfections WHICH HE DID NOT FOLLOW HIMSELF. The layman counselled him to cease from preaching for a time, and RETIRE FROM THE WORLD,

setting before him the sufferings of our Lord.

Acting on the layman's advice, Tauler retired into his convent, and betook himself to the life of discipline and trial. For two years he struggled on, suffering terrible inward conflicts. At last one day, as he was thinking of the sufferings of Christ and how poor his life had been compared with the love of God, he was overwhelmed with contrition and exclaimed: "O merciful God, have mercy upon me, a poor sinner, for Thy boundless mercy's sake, for I am not worthy that the earth should bear me." At this moment of utter breaking down he was filled with A GREAT TRUST IN GOD, and knew that CHRIST HAD INDEED POWER TO HEAL HIS SINFUL SOUL.

When the layman came again he told Tauler that now he had received the light of the Holy Spirit he could communicate to others. When he did

preach, he spoke of the love of the soul for the heavenly Bridegroom, and of the joy and rapture of union with the Beloved, with such a passionate conviction that the sermon brought light and the power of the Spirit to many, and was the beginning of a great revival which spread through the neighbouring country. He had trodden the path of self-surrender about which he had formerly merely talked, and his life was filled with the power of the Spirit as it never could have been before.

Like Francis, Tauler laid great emphasis on the need of detachment and freedom from the things of the world, the putting aside of everything that might stand between the soul and God. "If God is to shine in on thy soul brightly without a cloud, and accomplish His noble and glorious will in thee, thou must be free and unencumbered by all that affords thee comfort out of God." "Is it not a pitiful thing that a religious

man should spend his whole industry and sole effort, and have his thoughts turned day and night on his own little doings, and should be so full of them that he can hardly properly hold converse with God ? ”

Tauler lived eight years after this time and was the centre of a great revival. And what was the reason ? Simply this. He had found that his preaching was without power, that he was not converting men to God, because HIS OWN SINFUL SELF STOOD BETWEEN THOSE WHOM HE FAINTLY WOULD HELP AND THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT'S WORKING. His long spiritual travail was needed, because it was so hard for him to get rid of himself and to become a clear channel of God's power.

What would be the effect upon the Church to-day if every preacher, every Sunday School teacher, were to prove in their own experience that to be baptized with the power of the Spirit

is the right, nay more, is the bounden duty of every Christian soul.

“This is God’s righteousness,” said Tauler, “that He will give us to find His Kingdom by treading in Christ’s footsteps IN TRUE SELF-SURRENDER AND WILLING POORNESS OF SPIRIT.”¹

¹ For those who are desirous of having the complete story of the Friend and Tauler, I can confidently recommend the perusal of “The Three Friends of God,” by Frances Bevan (*James Nisbet & Co., London*).

BACK TO PENTECOST

I

THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER

“Wait for the promise of the Father . . . ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”—
ACTS i. 4, 5.

WHEN Christ came to this world to work out our redemption He received from the Father the Promise, when His work had been accomplished, of a rich reward. This was nothing less than that the Father would give to Him as Man the whole fulness of the Divine Spirit to bestow on all who believed in Him. It was in the last night, on His way to the cross that He communicated to the disciples the wonderful promise, with a revelation of all the glory that the Holy Spirit would work

in them. We are accustomed to think of the work of the Spirit as something that is easily understood, while we have very little apprehension of the supernatural and inconceivable blessedness of having the Spirit of God's own Son to dwell in us as our Life, our Teacher, and our Strength. Let us with holy reverence pause and consider what it implies.

Who is the Holy Spirit? He is a Person. He is the Spirit of God, He is God. He is the Third Person in the Godhead, the living bond of union between the Father and the Son. And no tongue can express the inconceivable privilege it is that this Spirit, Who searches the deep things of God, and knows all the secrets of the Trinity, should come in to us, dwell in us as in the temple of God, and pour all the love of God into our hearts. We often think of the Spirit as something that God gives us, a power or operation of

the Divine Being. But no, He is much more—He is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, in Whom They have Their life and love, and as such He will also be the Spirit of our life.

And what is to be His special work ?

1. The first thing that He does is, according to the teaching of our Lord in the last night, *to reveal Christ Jesus* in us in His indwelling and abiding presence. It was for this reason that He was called THE COMFORTER. The disciples were troubled, and their hearts filled with deep sorrow at the thought that they would lose His presence.

For the space of three years they had lived in His fellowship. It had been to them an unspeakable privilege and happiness to be His friends and companions, and enjoy the blessedness of His teaching and holy intimacy. Their hearts were in sore anguish at the very thought of losing Him, and here our Lord comes to tell them that the Holy

Spirit, the very life of Godhead, would come from heaven and make Christ's presence such a reality within them that they would have Him, their beloved Lord, more near to them, more intimately and powerfully present with them than they had ever known Him upon earth.

And so it actually happened. When the Spirit came their hearts overflowed with the love and the joy and the abiding consciousness of Christ with them and Christ in them. And this was not to be for those alone who had lived with Him on earth, but for all who would yield themselves in undivided surrender to Him, their Master.

2. The second work of the Holy Spirit of which our Lord speaks is that He, as THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, *would reveal God's truth*, not only by enlightening the understanding, but by making the truth a reality as life and power in their inmost being. He would, as the

Spirit of wisdom and revelation, give such a Divine enlightening of the eyes that heavenly things would in very truth form a heavenly life within them.

He would especially remind them of the words Christ had spoken upon earth, so that they might have the heavenly instruction Christ had given them but with this difference, that while Christ was upon earth they were not capable of accepting and carrying out what He taught them, whereas now the Spirit would work in them in the power of the unseen world.

3. A third name given to the Spirit is "THE HOLY SPIRIT." He is the Spirit of God's holiness, to Whom the work is entrusted of bringing that holiness into our heart and life. The word, "holy," is only thrice used in the Old Testament in regard to the Spirit, but in the New it is almost exclusively used in regard to Him. We think of Him as the One who imparts the Divine life

and holiness to all who are willing to receive Him.

It is He for Whom all souls unconsciously long to satisfy their spiritual need. It is He Who offers Himself to every living soul as a fountain of life and blessing. Unsearchable in the glory of His Divine being, He reveals Himself to all who truly long for His presence. He fills heaven and earth with God's glory, and is yet present in every single soul, as if this were the only one. He leads God's children into their blessed heritage—the Father's love and abiding presence, and the likeness to His image. It is to the sanctification of this Spirit of holiness that we have been called.

4. Now comes the fourth operation of the Spirit. "HE SHALL TESTIFY OF ME, and *ye shall also bear witness.*" The Spirit would first of all give witness to their being in Christ, and Christ in them (Rom. viii. 16). And the Spirit would

then through them testify as to what Christ was for them and in them. This would be the great mark of their preaching, that they did not speak of what they had not experienced, but of what Christ had done for them. They could boldly say: "Christ hath done it for me, He will do it for you."

And that would not only be true of the Apostles and teachers, but of every Christian as he told of what Christ had done for him. It was the testimony of a heavenly love filling the heart that gave such power to the message of simple and unlearned men. Heathen writers have left on record the power that such lives exercised. It was all the fulfilment of Christ's words: "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and be My witnesses to the ends of the earth."

5. The last work of the Holy Spirit in Christ's disciples of which He spake was—"THE SPIRIT SHALL GLORIFY ME ;

He shall take of Mine, and show it unto you." Christ was to ascend to heaven and to be seated on the throne in the glory of the Father. The disciples could form no conception of what that glory was.

The Spirit would come forth out of that glory, and bring it, with the very joy and power of heaven, into their hearts. It was as the Conqueror over every enemy, the conqueror of all sin, that Christ was seated upon the throne. The Holy Spirit would so reveal this conquering Christ in their hearts that they themselves would be more than conquerors through Him that loved them. Their life would then indeed be what Christ had promised: "If ye love Me, keep My commandments, and My Father will love you, and I will love you, and we will come and make our abode with you." It is Jesus the crucified, Jesus the glorified, Whom the Spirit will glorify in us, taking of the

things that are Christ's and declaring and imparting them to us.

Here we have the five-fold office of the Holy Spirit in the work He does in believers. Our Lord spake also of the work of the Spirit on the world, in convincing men of their sin in not believing in Christ. It was this that gave the disciples the assurance that their testimony would indeed have power to break the hardest heart, and to convince of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. And if ever, as alas is so universally the case now, the Church were to allow the spirit of the world to have the mastery, then the Holy Spirit would have to perform the work which was meant for the world on God's own people, and bring them to a new conviction of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

A careful study of the teaching of our Lord in regard to the work of the blessed Spirit will show us that there is

a double relation between the Spirit and the believer. First of all, He works in us all that is needed for a life of abiding in Christ and His love—a life of unceasing trust and dependence, and of absolute, unconditional obedience. And then He works further, in those who are filled with the Spirit, what is needed to make Christ known to others and to win men for Him. These are the two things that must go inseparably together: “He that abideth in Me beareth much fruit.” The Spirit reveals Christ in His abiding presence and love as the joy and the strength of my life. And from this flows most naturally and blessedly the power of bearing much fruit.

Let us seek, by a thoughtful and prayerful study of Christ’s teaching in the last night, to realize fully the wonderful mystery of this heavenly life of love and power which the Holy Spirit is given to maintain in us. And as we

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feel how little the Church experiences of that power, let us in singleness of heart seek nothing less than to have the promise of the Father fulfilled to us in all its power and blessing.

II

PENTECOSTAL PRAYER

“Wait for the promise of the Father.”—ACTS i. 4.

THE disciples were the heirs of the Father's promise—“heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.” They were present at the death of the testator (Heb. ix. 16). And now the last command of the risen Lord, ere He ascends to heaven, is: “Tarry, till ye be endued with power from on high.” Wait till you have inherited the promise. This alone, but this most certainly, will be your sufficient strength for the work I have entrusted to you.”

The disciples knew from the Old Testament the meaning and the power of the word: “Wait.” “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.” The Lord had said they would be bap-

tized with the Holy Ghost, they would receive power after the Holy Ghost was come upon them. When He had gone up to heaven they went at once to the Upper Room, and continued there with one accord in prayer and supplication. Their number was but one hundred and twenty, the few out of the tens of thousands who had come up to the feast, who believed in Christ as the Risen Lord.

Their expectation was not disappointed. With Pentecost, the promise of the Father came true, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. As essential as the promise of the Father was the prayer of His children; the one as indispensable as the other. As inconceivably glorious as was the promise, was the glory and the power of the prayer by which the gift was to be brought down to earth. And such will be our prayer too, as we set ourselves with all our hearts to wait for the gift.

That prayer of the first disciples is an example throughout the ages, and a pledge of how much prayer can avail. It is the assured proof that true, united, continuous prayer will always have the power of bringing down the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to this earth. Their prayer invites us to ask what it was that gave that prayer such power, and what it was in the petitioners that enabled them to pray that effectual prayer which availed so much—two questions of the deepest importance.

The first thing we notice ~~is~~ the unlimited faith with which the disciples counted upon their Lord in heaven. They knew Him as the Faithful and True. They had had fellowship with Him the risen One, in the living experience of His power. They had seen Him go up to heaven. There was no thought of His not fulfilling His promise. We feel inclined to say: “No wonder that they should have faith; they had

what we never can have." And yet we have a right to say we have all they had, and even more. We have the same Lord Jesus, revealed in us in His heavenly glory by the power of the Holy Spirit. We have what they had not, the inconceivable wonder of what had taken place with them; the Holy Spirit actually descending from heaven and filling them with heavenly power. Our faith has in very deed the same sure ground on which they rested, with the addition of the confirmation of the answer to their prayer.

But we must not only think of their faith. We remember the words of our Lord Jesus (John xiv. 15, 16), "If ye love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter." Their love to the Lord Jesus, seen in the keeping of His commandments, is stated to be the ground on which He could plead with the Father to send them the Spirit.

There was in very deed with the disciples an intimate burning love to the Lord who had ascended to heaven, and an unconditional surrender to obey His commandments to the very least.

They had given proof when He called them of their readiness to forsake all and to follow Him. With all their failings, they had indeed counted it their highest happiness to be with Him, and to obey His commands. They had followed Him to the cross and the grave. Though they had seen Him die, and were not able to believe that He would rise again, yet their hearts were so attached to Him, their love could think of nothing but of Him as their only Lord. It was this complete surrender of the whole heart and life that was accepted by Christ as the preparation that made them capable of receiving the fulness of the Spirit.

The question arises whether we, in our prayer for the Spirit, do indeed

yield ourselves with the same passionate love, whole-hearted devotion, and absolute obedience to the Lord and all His commandments, to be led by the Spirit and to be used wholly and only in His service and the fulfilment of His will. We cannot understand the prayer of Pentecost in its Divine power except as we study the whole disposition of the disciples and test ourselves by it.

Another thought. These men, as we have looked at them, were in very deed ready to yield themselves entirely to the control of the Spirit, and to allow themselves in everything to be led by Him. They were literally dead to the world; they had no thought of finding pleasure in its favour or help, they knew that the world hated them as it had hated Christ. They had no hope or desire, but that the Spirit of the glorified Lord Jesus should have complete possession and mastery. It was

their one desire that just as they had lived with Him here on earth in love and obedience, so they should live as those who belonged wholly to their glorified Lord in heaven by the power of His indwelling Spirit.

Is it not just here that we find the great lack in our prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit? We think too little that the Spirit comes as God, to take complete possession of my life, with all that this means. As I pray for His power there must at least be an intense desire to follow Him every moment of the day and so to walk after the Spirit. What we need to realize is that the Spirit as God will impart Himself to each one as completely as if he were the only one on earth in whom God dwells. As God He claims to have everything in my heart and life under His direct control, and in the inner man, in the life of knowing, feeling and willing, and by His direct opera-

tion to be my life. It is only when such is the aim of our spirits that we can with a Divine confidence expect that the Spirit will, as in the disciples, in full power take possession of us.

There is something more. The disciples were bound together in the bonds of a sacred, a Divine love. Jesus Christ was the centre round which they were all united. At the Last Supper that love was not yet in existence; they there disputed as to who should be the chief. But Christ's cross had bound them together as nothing else could have done. The Spirit that they received on the evening of the resurrection day made them one spirit and one body.

During the ten days of prayer each did not seek the Spirit for himself, but as in a fiery oven, all their selfishness was melted, and they indeed became one Body in which the Holy Spirit could have His dwelling, and God His

habitation. It is when God's people not only pray, each for His own circle or Church, but as members of Christ's body throughout the world, when they plead as those who are perfect in one even as the Father and the Son are one, that such united prayer will have an answer beyond all that we can ask or think.

There is another question that may be asked: Why was this united continual prayer needed? The Lord knew how they loved Him, how they longed to have His heavenly presence in their hearts; why could it not have been given without all that prayer? The question leads us into one of the deepest mysteries of godliness. In prayer God seeks to waken strong desire; it is then alone that our whole being opens up to receive His gifts, and that we will value those gifts as we should.

But there is something that goes deeper. When God gave the earth to

man to rule over it as king it was with the purpose that, even by Himself, nothing should be done without man's will. God has limited Himself, and made Himself dependent in the dispensing of His gifts, on what man really wills and desires. This is one of the highest tokens of man's nobility, that he has the power to say to God what he desires, and then to expect the answer.

So it was that the prayer at Pentecost was a proof of the power Christ had entrusted to His disciples that they should ask what they would, and it should be done to them. That prayer is therefore of indescribable value to us, as an encouragement and assurance that if we with our whole heart unite in asking God for the display of the power of the Spirit, it will most surely be given. We are "a royal priesthood." That is not only a title of honour or the expression of a blessed

experience. We have in very deed the office and the right to ask in the name of Christ, and in answer to our prayer the Father will give the Spirit to the souls round about us.

Would God that we believed with our whole heart in the glory of the prayer of Pentecost, and the courage it gives us to expect great things from our God !

III

THE FULFILMENT OF THE PROMISE

Ac 18

WE shall better understand what was the meaning of the Promise of the Father when we consider what took place at Pentecost. On the morning of that day, the disciples were with one accord praying and praising God, when all at once a sound from heaven was heard as of a rushing mighty wind, "tongues like as of fire" were seen to be resting on each, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. From out of the glory of God, out of the heart and hand of the Lord Jesus, they received that Spirit of the Son which the Father had promised them. They knew at once that this was what He meant when He said that they should be

baptized with Holy Ghost. They experienced the fact that, in the power of this Spirit, He Himself in His heavenly glory was in their midst, was in every heart.

They began at once to speak in strange tongues—a token of how the mighty power of God's Spirit could prepare them for the world-wide task of preaching the Gospel to every creature. And it served at the same time to draw the attention of the multitudes who were there representing different nations, and who cried out in amazement because each one heard them speak in his own language. All hearts were stirred and ready to listen.

When Peter rose, it was with a power not of himself that he was able in presence of the enemies of Christ to proclaim the truth that this was nothing less than the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy: "I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh." In the power of the

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Spirit what he had known of the Old Testament became all at once clear, and he could prove from the prophets how they had foretold that the crucified Christ should be raised from the dead. He preached at once the blessed truth that the crucified Jesus was now at the right hand of God on the throne as Lord and Christ.

The word came with inconceivable, with Divine power. Thousands were smitten to the heart at the thought that they had helped to crucify Him who now sat upon the throne of God, and cried out: "What shall we do?" The Holy Spirit had, as Christ had promised, convicted men of their unbelief. Peter in the power of the Spirit was able to give them the assurance of pardon. If they would but believe in the name of Jesus, they too would receive the Holy Spirit. And three thousand were gathered to the Church of the Lord. Could there ever have

been any more glorious fulfilment of the Father's promise than what was that day to be seen in the disciples, in Peter, and in the multitude who believed? What a Divine confirmation of the words of Christ: "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and shall be My witnesses."

And this was but a beginning. In the following days many more were added. All who believed were linked together as with the bonds of a Divine love by the power of the Holy Ghost. The love of Christ was the fire that melted them into one. They had all things in common, selling their possessions and goods, and imparting to all as every man had need. Daily with one accord they continued in the fellowship of prayer, praising God. It was in very deed heaven upon earth; Christ Jesus in His heavenly glory filling every heart.

When Peter and John a little later

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had miraculously healed the lame man they were summoned before the rulers. The new life and power of the Spirit gave them a supernatural boldness so that no threats could make them afraid, and they boldly said : “ We must obey God rather than men.” And when they returned to their own company and poured out their hearts in prayer it was not that they might be delivered from suffering, but only that they might speak the Word with boldness. In answer to their prayer the house in which they were assembled was shaken and they were all filled again with the Holy Ghost. “ And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul.”

This short summary of the events of Pentecost helps us to answer the question : “ Did not God in a wonderful way, beyond the possibility of human conception, fulfil the promise of the Father ? ” Just think for a moment

of the condition of the world even after Christ's resurrection. How hopeless everything would have been if He had gone to heaven without leaving that promise. The disciples would have been utterly unfit for the work entrusted to them. There would have been no possibility of the world's sharing in the fruit of Christ's death and resurrection. Christ's death would then indeed have been in vain.

But with that promise what a complete, all-sufficient, Divine provision for every need of the disciples and of the Church, and of mankind. The Holy Spirit was the all-sufficient equipment, first for the personal life of the disciples and all who should believe through them, and second, for all the work that had to be done throughout the world. That Spirit made it possible for every believer to please God by a faith that overcomes the world, and glorifies God in all his life. And He made it possible

for the whole Church and every member to overcome the prince of this world in the saving of souls and in the service of the Kingdom. Let us pause and think on all this until our hearts cry out in adoring worship: "To Him who hath given us His Holy Spirit be glory for ever and ever."

We have hitherto only dealt with the birth and the founding of the Church of Christ. Let us go a little further and think what Pentecost meant for the growth and the expansion of the Church.

We find (Acts v.) in the history of Ananias and Sapphira what the danger was with which the new-born Church was threatened in the temptations through the love of money and the influence that money might exercise. But the Spirit of God delivered from that danger.

We find (Acts vi.) the danger from the temptation to lack of love and con-

tention in the matter of the distribution of the alms of the Church. The Holy Spirit overcame that danger by the election of men full of the Spirit as deacons, who also preached the Word of God. We find (Acts vi. and vii.) in the story of Stephen, how in the midst of the danger of persecution the Holy Spirit gave the boldness to charge the people with the great sin of grieving the Holy Ghost, and enabled him joyfully to give himself as a martyr to die for Christ.

We find (Acts viii.), how in Samaria, the temptation to seek influence in the Church by the offer of money, was overcome by the Apostles as they prayed for the believers that they might receive the Holy Ghost. Against all the power of the prince of this world, whether in persecution or in the spirit of selfishness and jealousy, or in the power of the spirit of the world and its faith in money, the Spirit was the heavenly power that gave the victory.

That same Spirit also revealed His power in the great work of the expansion of the Church. In Acts ix. we read how the Lord from heaven Himself interposed to change Saul the persecutor into Paul, the penitent believer. Christ proved that He had not only given the Holy Spirit but that He Himself personally in heaven was watching over His Church, and would intervene with His Almighty hand on her behalf. In chap. x. we read of Peter's prayer at Joppa, and how in answer to that the Spirit led him to go to Cæsarea and be witness of the new outpouring of the Spirit upon the heathen.

In Acts xi. we read of those who were scattered abroad by the persecution after Stephen's death, and preached the Gospel in Phœnice and Cyprus and Antioch, some even speaking to the Grecians with such power that a number believed and turned to the Lord. What the Apostles would not have been ready

to do, the Lord by His Holy Spirit taught these men to do, and so to found the Church in the heathen world. And when the disciples heard of it at Jerusalem a man was found full of the Holy Ghost and of faith to be the special instrument for establishing and enlarging the work.

So we read in chap. xiii. of Barnabas and Saul, with three other leaders in this Church gathered from among the heathen, who separated themselves with fasting and prayer to wait upon the Lord to know what He would have them do further. The answer came in the voice of the Holy Spirit calling them to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work to which He had called them; and to send them forth to commence the great undertaking of reaching out to the heathen nations and to carry the Gospel where Christ's name had never yet been heard. From this beginning the Mission work of the Church

has continued to this day. This short sketch shows us what a perfect and all-sufficient fulfilment there was of the needs of the Church to enable her to obey the command to preach the Gospel to every creature even to the ends of the earth.

So complete was her equipment with the great power of God's Spirit that the Church, beginning with her one hundred and twenty members, was able within the first fifty years after Pentecost to do more for the extension of the Kingdom than the Church has ever yet been able to do within such a period. The Spirit lived and wrought in the believers with such power, and such a heavenly fire of love and zeal, that the heathen stood amazed over this great wonder that men of different races, different degrees of civilization and of learning, so loved each other that they really felt and acted as one body. The fire of love to their Lord proved itself

in the devotion with which travellers and merchants and slaves, soldiers and sailors, who had received the new religion in its Divine power, were ever ready to make Christ known, and so to speak of His love that multitudes were brought to accept the faith.

Dear Christians, let us reflect and pray until our hearts be full of the heavenly assurance—how gloriously the Father in heaven, beyond all we could ask or think, fulfils the Divine promise which Christ gave His disciples. And let us then add: How gloriously He waits even now to fulfil the promise to us too.

IV

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

WE have now considered the birth of the Church of Christ, and its first manifestation in the world, in the light of Pentecost as the fulfilment of the Father's promise. To realize the full meaning of what was contained in that promise we must now look for a moment at the further history of the Church, to see in how far the Promise provided for its needs. The answer will fill us with shame and sorrow as we find how far the Church failed in that life of prayer in which she was to be endued from on high for her great work of making Christ known to all.

We know how, somewhat towards the end of the first century, our Lord gave to John the command to write his

Seven Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia. Of these seven Churches there were only two, Smyrna and Philadelphia, of whom the Lord could speak with approval as being what he desired. To five of them came the call to repentance. In Ephesus there was much activity and zeal for the truth, and yet—they had forsaken their first love. To Sardis the solemn word is spoken: “Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead.” To Laodicea: “Because thou art lukewarm I will spue thee out of My mouth.” And both Pergamos and Thyatira had been unfaithful in bearing with false doctrine. The impression that the whole makes is that the Churches had already departed very far from the leading and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Church History teaches us that it was not much later that the office of the ministry began to exalt itself above the ordinary Christian and that gradually the error crept in that the minister

was a priest who could act as mediator between God and man. The Church gradually became a human society to such an extent that by the year 300 A.D. it had an organization very like that of the state, in which one of the chief bishops, and later on the Pope was the head. It was at this time too that it became manifest how the fervent brotherly love which had made such a deep impression on the heathen, had given way to jealousy and contention, which were only too manifest in the great Councils. As we then follow the story we find that in the Middle Ages such darkness and ungodliness reigned at Rome that the Church became a reproach to the whole civilized world.

When the Reformation came there was a great change both in life and doctrine. And yet how far the Reformation was from being a return to Pentecost. The disputes and bitterness among the Reformers themselves, the

lack of a powerful, holy, Christian life among the members of the Church, and even among its teachers, was proof of how little the Spirit of God indeed ruled. Later on more than one great movement strove to lead Christians to a holier life, as the work of the Pietists and Moravians in Germany, the work of the Puritans and John Wesley and Whitefield in England and Scotland, gave proof of the power of the Spirit. And yet throughout the Church as a whole how far the life was from being after the New Testament model.

With the commencement of the nineteenth century the great revival in connection with Mission work proved the presence of the power of the Spirit. This was confined to a comparatively small circle. Compared with those who were zealous for the extension of the Kingdom a large majority took no part in the work. In later times God sent men through whom the great Evan-

gelistic missions were carried on, and proof was given of the power of the Spirit to convert multitudes.

And yet at the close of the last century how frequently the remark was heard as to the terrible power of the world and of temporal things with the great majority of Christians. As a result of that, in the present century what a painful discovery has been made as to the loss of members, as to neglect of Church-going and family-worship, and the comparatively small number of Sunday scholars who become members of the Church. As yet the Church has found no means for meeting the difficulty and recovering what she has lost.

And now with this war, what is the influence that it is likely to exert on the Church as a whole? At its commencement there appeared to be in England a greater seriousness among the people. Prayer meetings were

better attended. With the Day of Prayer on 3rd January 1915 many thought that there were signs of confession of sin and repentance as a people. But the religious magazines complain that these promising signs have not been realized. The power of the world, with its business and its pleasures and its devotion to the seen and temporal, is too much in evidence.

From America many months ago there came an invitation to pray for a Revival as marked and mighty as the war is ; but there are no signs of such a hope being realized. As yet we can hardly say that God's judgment is teaching the nations righteousness. For all the many cases of the acceptance of Christ and the bold confession of Him in connection with the distribution of the New Testaments among the men at the front, we are deeply grateful, and yet it is to be feared that the very great majority are as yet untouched.

And now the great question ever returns: What can be the reason that our Christianity is so impotent that it could not prevent such a war? What can be the reason that the preaching of the Gospel has so little power in most cases to train men to a life of undivided consecration to Christ and His service? What can be the reason that while there are openings in the world for reaching millions on millions the Church finds it so difficult to find the men and means to extend its work? What can be the reason that even from the missionaries themselves the voice is heard that there is not that spiritual efficiency, and that power of leading the native Churches into the abundant life of joy and holiness which God's Word has promised to bestow?

The question is ever one and the same throughout the Christian world: What can be the reason that with Christ upon the throne clothed with Divine

power, with the Holy Spirit to endue God's servants with all the grace they need, with all the glorious promises that in answer to prayer God in heaven will do whatsoever we ask—what can be the reason of this sad state of things ?

The more one thinks and seeks and prays, the more we are compelled to the conclusion : the Church lacks THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT HAS BEEN PROMISED TO FIT HER FOR HER WORK. When we further ask, what can be the reason of such a lack of the Spirit Who has been so definitely promised, and who yearns in love to take possession of God's children and to fit them for their work, the question has but one answer : "Ye have not, because ye ask not." And when the further question comes : What can be the reason that there is, comparatively speaking, so little prayer, while the promise is so rich and sure and blessed ? —then there is no answer but the con-

fession, with shame—God grant, with deep sorrow and penitence—that we are too slothful, and too worldly to pray in power the prayer that availeth much.

We are too lukewarm and self-contented and blinded really to see that it actually depends on us whether God will pour out His Spirit in greater power. And then further that no change can come until a larger number of God's people yield themselves as living sacrifices in full surrender to the Holy Spirit, to be renewed and filled and sanctified and strengthened for the great work which God has promised to do through us, and which, alas, is suffering through our unbelief and our unfaithfulness.

V

THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

WHEN Christ ascended to heaven, and left His disciples in their utter impotence, amid the deadly enmity of the world around them, and the great work for which they were utterly unfit, they felt that there was but one thing that could help them—there was but one thing needful. And that was power from on high, the power of the Holy Ghost, Whom Christ had promised. They knew that in order to receive that Spirit and His power there was but one thing for them to do,—to wait on their Lord for the fulfilment of the promise, to continue with one accord in prayer and supplication until the promise was fulfilled, and they were baptized with the Holy Ghost.

During the ten days, from Ascension to Pentecost, it was literally just this one thing that occupied their hearts and that gave them courage gladly to face the future. The answer to every question that could be put was this simple one: In accordance with the command of our Lord we are waiting for Him to send us the Spirit from heaven. The same Lord Who had given the great Commission, "Preach the Gospel to every creature," had also given as His last injunction the command: "Tarry; go not; preach not; wait until ye receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming on you."

The Church has, during this last century, with ever increasing seriousness of purpose sounded the Great Commission: "Preach the Gospel to every creature," until it has gradually become with all earnest Christians an article of faith. Every Christian is bound to take his part in making Christ known

throughout the world. That command was not meant for the disciples alone : they would within a few years all have passed away. The command was meant for all disciples, all believers, to the end of the world.

Christ meant the gift of the Spirit to be for all who believe in Him ; and He counted upon it that everyone who had tasted His love would help to make that love known to others. And just as it was with this command, so it was with the promise that the Father should give the Spirit in answer to prayer. That promise is meant for every believer, and the command to wait for the promise of the Father and to yield to the Holy Spirit for the power to witness for Christ is also for everyone.

The promise of the Spirit, and the command to wait in prayer for his filling and fitting for service are meant for every child of God. And there thus rests upon every member of the Church

the double responsibility ; first of all, to be ready to obey the command of making Christ known to every creature, and then to wait and strive together in prayer until the fulness of the Spirit has come to us too.

But see what has happened ; there are many who admit that the calling to obey the first half of the command, and to help to make the Gospel known to every creature, rests upon them, and who are willing to give their money or their aid in making that Gospel known. But they are not willing to obey the second half of the command, and to unite in fervent and unceasing prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit to enable them and the Church around them to testify in power for Christ.

Everyone can understand that it profits but little to help in making the Gospel known unless we are ready also to pray every day for the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Every-

one can understand that just as the one thing needful from God's side is the continual renewal of the gift of the Spirit, so the one thing needful on our side must be the willingness and the surrender in very deed to ask and to wait for and to expect the Spirit as the power for service.

The important question now arises : Can anything be done to rouse the Church to a right sense of the indispensable need of much, of continual, of believing prayer for the powerful manifestation of God's Spirit, first in all His children, then specially in all ministers and workers, and then in the souls that as yet do not know God ? We may be sure that there is no fate ruling over us condemning us to continue content with the present conditions. We know for certain that as God is an ocean of infinite love and compassion which He longs to pour out over us, He is as able as He is eager to work in us

the great things for which His Spirit was promised.

Will it not be the beginning of the change, if each Christian will offer himself personally to the Lord to wait upon Him to be taught and trained as an intercessor to plead for the great gift from heaven. If this is indeed to come, then we need to give ourselves the time for fellowship with God, that He may sanctify us and inspire us with the desire and the courage of the first disciples, in view of the preaching of the Gospel in Christian countries or among the heathen, to make the continual experience of the power of the Holy Spirit the chief thought in life and in death.

Let us not forget that God takes the sad condition of our Christianity far more to heart than any man on earth can do. God sorrows and is deeply grieved at what He sees, and longs far more than we have any conception

of for a change. But He cannot give without the co-operation of man. He has entrusted man with the high office of sending up his supplication from earth, and must needs wait for him before He can reveal His glory.

And what God longs for in us may be put in a few words :—

1. WHAT THANKS WE OWE HIM, that after having given His Son He has in very deed given the Spirit of that Son to live in our hearts and reveal Christ in the power of His Divine life working in us! And He has so ordered it that this indwelling of Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit should be the endowment with power from on high, giving us an all-sufficient provision for all the work that has to be done in the carrying out of the high commission. Let us take time to worship and to come under the deep impression of the inconceivable privilege of this communication of the ^{the} Spirit of God as our power

for life and service. The Holy Spirit is in very deed the abundant and all-sufficient supply for every need, for every Christian, and that for every day.

2. WHAT REASON FOR SHAME AND HUMILIATION we have that the Church has so little honoured the Holy Spirit so that His operations are but feeble compared with what He is willing to do ! Every complaint in regard to the lack of power in the preaching of the Gospel, the great dearth of conversions, the feebleness of the Christian life in the converts, the loss of membership and Church-goers and Sunday scholars, the terrible power of the world and its self-pleasing,—all this is to be ascribed to one cause : the Holy Spirit is not sought and known and honoured as He should be.

Take time in true contrition of heart to come under the right impression of the real state of things until our hearts

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are driven to ask God graciously to interpose.

3. WITH WHAT ASSURED CONFIDENCE may we not count upon the promise of the Father to fill even now in these days the hearts of His servants with power from on high! If only we, like the disciples, are ready to forsake all and to follow Christ in the fellowship of His sufferings and cross; if we, like them, live as those who are crucified to the world, and seek to know nothing but Christ alone;—the power from heaven will be given to us as to them. Let us cultivate with our whole heart such an assurance, and yield ourselves to its power;—Christ will fulfil His Word: “He that believeth in Me, out of him shall flow rivers of living water.”

4. WHAT AN EARNEST CALL, to yield ourselves undividedly to the great work of united intercession, that God would pour down upon His people the Spirit of grace and of supplication! The call

to yield one's self to the great work of priestly intercession will become ever more urgent in the heart of each one who will only take time in God's presence, to yield himself to the power of these thoughts.

May the Lord strengthen us to see that the greatest work that any man can do upon earth is this—to appropriate the great promise of the Father, to plead it before God, and with strong desire to expect the answer. Let the word—"THE ONE THING NEEDFUL, THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT FROM HEAVEN," take root in our hearts, and grow up and bear fruit in unceasing faith and prayer. Let us with it tarry in God's presence. Let us in its light look out upon the Church with hearts full of compassion. Let us speak and pray about it with our brethren. God hears prayer, God will most assuredly give the answer.

VI

UNITED PRAYER

WHEN our Lord called His disciples together, His one desire was that they should gather round Him as a closely united company of believers. But they were not ready for this; even at the Last Supper there was strife amongst them which of them should be the greatest. After Christ's Resurrection there was a marked difference.

When He had breathed upon them, and said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," they were through the Spirit moulded into one body. During the forty days when He was no longer with them, their hearts were knit together in love. After our Lord's Ascension, during the ten days of prayer, they "all with one accord continued sted-

fastly in prayer," each one praying, not alone for himself, but united with others, for the Holy Spirit to descend on all.

The Holy Spirit found in these praying disciples a Body in which to dwell, and they were truly "one heart and one soul." And so "the holy temple in the Lord" was begun, built upon Jesus Christ, "the Chief Cornerstone," in whom "ye also are builded together for an habitation of God in the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 22). The very first thing we read of the early Church on the Day of Pentecost is, that "they continued daily with one accord in prayer."

United prayer is the secret of the power of the Church. In united prayer individual desires are set aside, in order to pray with and for others; in united prayer a heavenly love is exercised, and the Holy Spirit is able to carry on His gracious work in building up the Body of Christ.

This is what the Lord Jesus in His High Priestly prayer asked of the Father for all future believers, “*THAT they may all be one*, even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, *THAT THEY ALSO MAY BE ONE IN US*, that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. And the glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given unto them; *THAT THEY MAY BE ONE*, even as We are one; I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be *PERFECTED INTO ONE*; that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and lovedst them even as Thou lovedst Me.”

Four times Christ prayed definitely for the mutual oneness of all believers. This would be the sign of the new birth from heaven, “perfect in one,” even as the Father and Son were one. It would be a proof to the world that Christ had come from God, and that God had given the same love into the hearts of His disciples, as the Father had bestowed on Him.

We learn from Church History that when the heathen saw how the Christians, drawn from different nations, and formerly deadly enemies, learned to love one another, and even to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others, they exclaimed: "Behold how these Christians love one another; only the power of God could have worked such a miracle."

This thought of our oneness in Jesus Christ gives point to the question: Was this unanimity of the disciples during the ten days of waiting, an indispensable element in the wonderful answer to these prayers? Is the same unity indispensable in our day? Would an ever-increasing unity not give power to those who pray on earth, as well as in heaven, where prayers are heard and answered?

We thank God for the prayer that ascends to heaven from His people all over the world. There are Societies,

like the China Inland Mission, with more than one thousand missionaries, who never ask for money, but receive the support for all their missionaries from God Himself in answer to daily united prayer.

And yet in the case of many prayers, the motive too often is the local interest in one's own sphere of labour. When Mr Mott, speaking on this subject, alludes to the appalling lack of true intercessors, he means men and women who can really pray and plead with God for the Church in her feeble state and her great need of the Holy Spirit. This is the primary need that God's people realize that they must pray, not only for their own narrow circle, but for the whole world.

True, the work of prayer begins at home, but it must not stay there. Believers must meet together and bring the need of the Church as a whole before God, and continue before Him in prayer

until the promise is fulfilled : “ Shall God not avenge His elect who call upon Him night and day ? ”

Paul writes to the Colossians : “ I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh ” (Col. ii. 1). And to the Church at Ephesus, that they should pray always “ with all prayer and supplication, watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints ” (Eph. vi. 18).

There is one Body and one Spirit. As God’s children bear up the whole Body of Christ in intercession before the Throne of Grace, their hearts become filled with Christ’s love to the whole world, and they learn to expect great things from God.

When we pray only for our own Church and its Mission work, we are in danger of allowing our own interests and the honour of our Church to occupy too much of our thoughts, so that our

prayers and our faith do not reach out whole-heartedly with Christ-like love to the interests of God's Kingdom. On the other hand, if the love of Christ constrains us, and our hearts are full of the great thoughts of God, we will have more freedom in prayer to plead, not only for our own personal concerns, but for the glory of God's Name, and for His people all over the world.

May these thoughts help us to a deeper insight into our high-priestly calling. Let us pray faithfully for the Mission work in which we are specially interested. But let us not rest content with that. Remember the work of the Churches and Missionary Societies around you. This will widen your sympathies, and teach you to love like Christ. Think of what you have heard of the needy state of the Church in different parts of the world. Pray earnestly that God may send His Spirit with power over the whole earth.

Pray that in the midst of the misery caused by the war the oneness of the Spirit may be preserved among God's people. Live as one who is a member of a spiritual Kingdom, which seeks to save the whole world. Cultivate the consciousness that you are one of a number of intercessors who give God no rest, day or night, until He has made His Church a praise in the earth.

VII

DAILY PRAYER

WE do not here refer to prayer for ourselves as a means of exercising and strengthening our spiritual life in fellowship with God. The true Christian will count it not only a holy duty, but a great privilege to live constantly in communion with God and with His Son Jesus Christ. We here refer to daily prayer as intercession for all believers, and for the whole world in fellowship with all God's children.

After Christ's ascension, the disciples continued stedfastly in prayer; without knowing how long the answer might be delayed they kept on till at last the blessing came. When the three thousand had been converted, they also continued in prayer with the disciples

We read in Acts ii. 46 : “ They continued daily with one accord in the Temple, praising God.”

In the light of what our Lord said about God’s elect who cry unto Him night and day, and of what Paul said : “ Praying always with all perseverance and supplication for all saints ” (Eph. vi. 18), we see how truly indispensable such continuous prayer is for the spiritual welfare of God’s people, and for bringing down blessing on the whole world.

Think of the Lord’s Prayer. Our Lord knew that this prayer would be used daily by millions of people. What was the first petition, after the invocation and the prayer for the hallowing of God’s Name ? The first petition is : “ Thy Kingdom Come ! ” This teaches us the lesson that the coming of the Kingdom should take the first place in the heart of every true follower of Christ. It is most important for each

Christian to understand this, and to act accordingly.

The child of God needs a new vision in order to realize his calling according to God's Word. Often when a man is first converted he is chiefly concerned about the safety of his own soul, and he seeks to preserve and strengthen his spiritual life. Then as a secondary matter, he thinks he must do something for God and His Kingdom, but only as much as he decides to be his duty. This view is a very defective one. God's thoughts are not our thoughts; it is His sovereign will that each believer should look upon himself, not as his own master, but as the undisputed property of the Lord Jesus.

The first question should always be: What does my Lord require of me? I MUST LIVE ONLY AND WHOLLY FOR HIS SERVICE. Each day I must ask myself what He would have me to do. This is the question of a slave purchased

to do the will of his master, of the soldier who has sworn fealty to his commanding officer, of the angels whom God created to show forth His praise. And shall not the desire of the redeemed sinner whom Christ has purchased with His blood be to show forth His praise in daily life ?

The question arises : How can I know each day what I should do ? The answer is simple. There is one thing you can do and ought to do every day. And that is, to pray the prayer : " Thy Kingdom Come ! " This presupposes that you have thought the matter over earnestly, that you desire it with all your heart, that your daily life is such that you have the right to believe that your prayer will have power, and that you can honestly say that you desire above all things that Christ may be known and honoured as Lord of all.

There are too many Christians who, with a certain measure of zeal, try to

do God's will, who even take part in the Church service or prayer-meeting, but who have never offered themselves to God as priests to intercede for the salvation of souls, or to ask for the Spirit to be poured on all who are working for God. A great change in the Church is needed, if Christianity is to become a power in the world.

I do not here allude to those who do not pray for others. My message is to all those who know something of the work of intercession, and I would encourage all such to give themselves more whole-heartedly to this service. Let every believer realize his holy calling to wait upon God each day, and remind Him of "the promise of the Father," and the urgent need of a new and powerful outpouring of the Spirit on all God's servants in all parts of the world.

Think for a moment what this means. You profess to belong wholly to God,

with all that you possess, that you have yielded yourself, soul and body, as a living sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. You have said (have you not ?) that all you have belongs to God, and that you are ready, if He requires it, to offer yourself for His service. And that offer includes your time. If God needs your time, will you give it to Him gladly ?

God actually has need of your time. In worldly matters I can secure almost anything if I only have the time for it. I can give my time in exchange for money, for learning, for pleasure, for the happiness of myself or of others. If I devote time to anything I expect in some way or other to be rewarded. This is equally true of God and His service.

God greatly needs the prayers of His people. He has so planned things that He sends down heavenly blessings in answer to believing prayer. The child

of God who really understands and believes this counts it an unspeakable privilege and joy to "continue instant in prayer." He realizes what a blessed experience it is to spend a quarter of an hour or more each day with God, in praying for the fulfilment of the promise. He knows that God will assuredly hear his prayer, and pour out the Holy Spirit upon His waiting people. As he wonders that he did not grasp this truth sooner, he looks up to his heavenly Father for grace to enable him, now and henceforth, to continue the work of intercession.

Beloved Christian, what think you? Is this call to daily prayer in the ministry of intercession not one of the most wonderful of God's gifts to His children? Must you not confess that you understand the secret of prayer all too little? Pray earnestly for yourself and for those around you that you may prevail, even as Jacob did, who wrestled

with the angel, until he received a new name, that of Israel, "for as a prince thou hast power with God, and hast prevailed."

We said in an earlier chapter that there was great need for God's children to unite, to bind themselves as it were, together for united prayer. Fortunately in such united prayer it is not necessary to be together in the same place. We may, by mutual agreement, meet in God's presence each day, and remember our brethren, who, in different parts of the world, are also waiting upon God, and so we can as one Body practise the fellowship of the Spirit. We shall realize as never before that Unity is Strength. Where two or three agree in Christ's Name, there He, the Omnipresent One, is in our midst, and present in each one of us. God grant that His children who call upon Him day and night may claim the victory through the power of the Holy Spirit.

VIII

THE GREAT HINDRANCE

A SHORT time ago I received a letter from a minister in the Transvaal, asking me to come and hold special services for him. At the end of the letter he said: "When will the Revival in the Church come for which we have so long prayed? What can be the hindrance?"

This is a question of the deepest importance, which many of God's children are asking, and to which a definite answer is greatly needed. But the answer will not help us much, unless we are ready to obey what God's Word shows us to be His will in the matter. I invite my readers to consider earnestly and prayerfully with me what Scripture teaches on the subject.

We find the first answer in the words of our Lord Jesus, when His disciples asked him, "Why could we not?" — "BECAUSE OF YOUR UNBELIEF." God's promises concerning the power of the Holy Spirit, with which His servants should be endued for their work in the world, are so clear and definite that if we only had the necessary faith, the promise would assuredly be fulfilled: "He that believeth in Me, out of him shall flow rivers of living water."

God waits for the believing prayers of His people to give the power of the Holy Spirit in full measure. But we too often lack the faith and the child-like confidence that can claim the promise. Even those who pray most earnestly acknowledge that it is hard to attain to the full assurance of faith that the blessing will come.

This brings us to the second question, a word of still deeper meaning: Why were the disciples, who had formerly

cast out devils, now lacking in the necessary faith? Christ gives us the answer: "This kind goeth not out, BUT BY PRAYER AND FASTING." That is to say: "You have prayed, but your prayer was not the prayer of self-sacrifice that is so essential in the fight with the power of the Evil One." Fasting signified the sacrifice, not only of what was lawful, but of whatever tended to the gratification of the senses and occupied the mind with that which was seen and temporal. And the prayer that avails much demands self-denial and the giving up of all that would hinder the soul in its approach to God.

David said of such prayer: "Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." The evening sacrifice was the lamb that was laid on the altar each evening as a burnt offering, to be wholly consumed by the

fire. David's longing desire was that his prayer should be such a sacrifice.

Such was the prayer of our Lord when "in the days of His flesh He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears." That prayer was the full surrender of His will to God.

Such was the prayer of which Isaiah says : "There is none that calleth upon Thy Name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee." The disciples too had lacked the prayer of self-sacrifice, and so their faith had failed. Many a one who would fain pray in faith finds that he has not the power to do so, because he has not surrendered his will unreservedly to God, and he lacks the self-denial and self-control which are essential.

Is there not something wrong with our Christianity that God's children know so little experimentally what the prayer of faith is as a result of God's

grace in the heart? We read this solemn word in Isaiah: "When ye make many prayers I will not hear." Are our prayers not too often a form of words alone? God has graciously granted us blessing in the past in the conversion of souls. Many of God's children feel deeply that a victorious life of prayer in the Church is not more visibly manifest, or the power from on high to win souls for the Kingdom.

We must ask ourselves if there is not something fundamentally wrong in the state of the Church all over the world to account for its feeble condition. May we not find an explanation in these words of Paul: "My preaching was not in persuasive words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power; THAT YOUR FAITH SHOULD NOT STAND IN THE WISDOM OF MEN, but in the power of God."

The Reformation—as even the Reformers themselves acknowledged—was

more a reformation in doctrine than in life. On the Day of Pentecost there was a complete change in the spiritual life of the disciples; the joy and the love and the holiness of heaven came down to earth through the power of the Holy Spirit. And the preaching of the Word was manifestly "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

After the Reformation the doctrines of justification by faith and the forgiveness of sins by God alone were taught by the Church, but too often "in persuasive words of man's wisdom." Unfortunately this is still the case. "The demonstration of the Spirit and of power" is lacking in much of our present-day preaching.

We put our trust in man's wisdom rather than in the almighty power of God. The whole education of our ministers tends to teach them to regard the preaching of a good sermon as the test of a good minister. Our Lord's

command was : “Tarry ye,”—wait,—do not preach,—“UNTIL YE BE CLOTHED WITH POWER FROM ON HIGH.” With Him the first great need of the preacher was the baptism of the Spirit. Is this not the reason of the feebleness of the Church, that our faith is in man’s wisdom more than in the power of God ?

Is this not the reason that with all our efforts to believe and to pray aright we are powerless to take God’s Word and hold on to it in faith ? Is this not the reason why many of God’s children are discouraged and deeply convinced of their own inability to pray the effectual fervent prayer that prevails with God ?

But there is more. Shall we not go a step further and ask : What is the teaching of God’s Word by which we may regain the first joy and power of the Church of Christ ? We must first learn how impossible it is for us to attain to a life of faith in our own strength

or by efforts of our own. We must acknowledge our impotence, and expect God by the continual inspiration of His Holy Spirit to work in us a full and strong faith in the promises of His Word.

Christ said to His disciples, in regard to the rich young ruler: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God!" And when the disciples said: If it is so hard: "Who then can be saved?" The answer of Jesus was: "With men it is impossible, but not with God."

We imagine that we understand the meaning of that word "impossible," and yet our grasp of it is so superficial that it does not help us. We need to realize that as little as mortal man can create an angel, so little can he increase or nourish the life of God in his soul. It is only when we have reached the point of utter despair in ourselves, and realize the impossibility

of attaining to a new life in our own strength, that we shall learn to take our right places before God in full dependence upon and obedience to His Spirit.

Our grasp of the meaning of the word "possible," or "possible with God," is equally defective. We need to come under the deep impression of what the word "impossible" means, and then only will the eyes of our hearts be opened to see what is implied in the words: "possible with God." Let us keep in mind these two thoughts—with man it is impossible to increase the life of God in the soul, with God it is both possible and certain that He will, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, work the Divine life within us in power. Then we shall be able to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit with a true expectant faith.

When the soul is burdened with a sense of its own impotence, and trusts

in God alone, then hope will spring up that God in His infinite mercy and love will sustain this heavenly life within us from hour to hour. And at last we shall begin to understand that this life is an immediate continual receiving from God through Christ and the Holy Spirit from moment to moment.

Brethren, is not this the great hindrance? We have failed to grasp what God's Word teaches of the work of the Holy Spirit, and this has prevented us from praying the effectual fervent prayer that brings the blessing. Our prayer and faith will not avail unless we are ready to sacrifice much that is pleasing to the flesh, and that nourishes the life of self. We have in the past put our trust too much in our own wisdom, in trying to grasp spiritual things, and have not listened to the voice of Christ saying: "The Spirit shall teach you all things." "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy

Ghost.” If we have at all taken these thoughts to heart, we shall be brought to a state of despair in ourselves and our own wisdom, and the new life of faith, which God alone can and will work in us, will have a birth in our souls.

Beloved Christian, the question, What can the hindrance be? comes to each of us as a personal one. If others around you are indifferent, will you not step out in faith and have definite dealings with God in the matter? Cry to God in His boundless mercy to hear you, and continue in prayer until you come under a sense of your own ignorance and misery and of the riches of His grace which waits to take possession of you.

Let the thought constantly occupy your mind—the one thing lacking is the power of the Holy Spirit. Beseech God to reveal to you clearly and distinctly what the hindrance in your life is that He cannot fill you with the Holy

Spirit? Is it the power of unbelief, or the lack of prayer and self-sacrifice, or the too great confidence in man's wisdom? Whatever the cause of the evil may be, let us firmly trust in God's everlasting love to bestow on His waiting children in full measure, the wonderful promise of the Father, **THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

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